



How to Create a Premise for your Sunrise Publishing Audition

Time to Create a Premise

Start with the Premise

Now what? You delivered your pitch, and the agent looks at you and says, “Okay, I like it . . . tell me more.” You have to deliver! That’s where your **premise** comes in. What’s the difference between a premise and a pitch? Length and depth.

A premise is simply a two to five sentence blurb of your story. You’re still in the elevator, but you want to zero in on the *most* important elements of your book: the stakes, the fears, the dreams, the theme and plot, and the main players. It’s those things we used in the Big Bang of the synopsis, and we crafted it before we even started our novel. We’re way ahead of the game!

Just as a recap, the premise boils down the most important aspects of your story, the biggest interest catcher, into a short paragraph. After working on your story for a while, you may want to refine it to match your pitch better.

Here's the pitch from *Tying the Knot*:

A so-called gang member is trying to save a woman’s life...too bad she believes he’s the one that tried to kill her.

Here’s the follow-up premise:

Noah Standing Bear has a knack for being in the right place at the right time. But when he sees a woman gunned down, can he help her find healing? Worse, when it happens again, what will it cost him to save her?



The Sovereign's Legacy:

The pitch:

He's charged with protecting a lowly servant girl from the house of the Russian Czar except what if she's not a servant? What if she's really the princess?

The premise:

Royal daughter Oksana can't believe her father entrusted her life to a lowly peasant. Peace-loving Mennonite merchant Anton Klassen is paralyzed by his charge – especially when he falls in love with her. Can two people from different lives find a way to protect Russia's most valuable secret?

A premise is softer, and is the follow up to the pitch.

When you're creating a premise, we have a formula from Susie May's My Book Therapy that will help you:

Who + Problem + Goal + Trouble/Conflict + Stakes + Story Question + Marketing Tag

Let's take a look at each of these pieces:

- Who is your character?
- What is your character's goal?
- What stands in his/her way? (Trouble/Conflict)
- What is at Stake (their worst fear?)
- What is the Story Question?
- What other books/movies is your novel like? Where does it fit?



This is from *My Foolish Heart*:

Who:

Hero: Caleb Knight. Soldier, wounded in battle, football coach.

Heroine: Izzy Presley. Talk show host to the lovelorn (who's never had a date).

Goal:

Izzy wants to leave the house because she's Agoraphobic. Normal life!

Caleb wants to be the coach of the football team & meet the girl next door, but he keeps failing. He needs a little help from a therapist! And, of course, he's hiding his handicap.

Conflict/Problem:

Izzy is hiding a secret – she's never been on a date.

Caleb is hiding his wounds/scars from the war

Stakes: What will happen if they don't accomplish their goals? Why should someone read your book?

Izzy: Will she be trapped in her house forever?

Caleb: His secret will come out – and will they love him if he's not who they imagine?

Story question: Can two people fall in love over the radio? Can you fall in love with someone's heart before you see their face? Could you fall in love with someone who doesn't have a face?

Marketing Tag: How can you position your book in the marketplace?

It's *Sleepless in Seattle*, and *You've Got Mail*, and *Friday Night Lights*. Small town, nostalgic yet contemporary story.

Now if I was pitching it from the heroine's POV,

She's a talk show host to the lovelorn. Only problem is – she's never had a date.



Izzy Presley is a radio talk show host who is trapped in her home after a tragic accident left her with panic attacks. She longs to leave the house, fall in love and have a regular life. Her problems could be solved when she falls in love with Boy Next Door, a voice on the radio. But what if he really is...the boy next door. Will she have the courage to leave her safety zone...and meet him? It's You've Got Mail over the airwaves.

And, this is from Caleb, the hero's POV:

Caleb Knight survived a war – but being a small-town football coach will be the biggest battle he's ever fought.

Caleb Knight just wants to move on with his life. A decorated – and wounded – soldier, he's determined not to let his prosthetic leg stand in the way of his dream to coach small town football, fall in love and live a normal life...starting with meeting the pretty girl next door. It's easier to talk to the girl on the radio – she can't see his scars. But when his on-air life meets his real life, will he sacrifice his coaching dreams to win the girl? And will she love him after she discover his lies? It's You've Got Mail and Sleepless in Seattle meets Friday Night Lights.

Add in both POVs:

Hero + what He wants + Conflict. Heroine + what she wants + Conflict + Stakes + Story Question + Tag

Izzy Presley is a radio talk show host who is trapped in her home after a tragic accident left her with panic attacks. She longs to leave the house, fall in love and have a regular life. Caleb Knight just wants to move on with his life. A decorated – and wounded – soldier, he's determined not to let his prosthetic leg stand in the way of his dream to coach small town football, fall in love and live a normal life...starting with meeting the pretty girl next door. When the Izzy's radio show provides the magic they need to meet the perfect one...will they be able to take their love "off the air" and into reality? It's You've Got Mail meets Friday Night Lights.



Keep a pitch short—about 50 words, then follow up with your premise.

Create your Premise Exercise.

- ✓ Who...
- ✓ He/She **Wants** ...
- ✓ **But/If Only** (Conflict) ...
- ✓ And if he **Fails** (Stakes) ...
- ✓ **Will/Can** (Story Question) ...?
- ✓ It's **Like**... (Marketing Tag) ...